

# **AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING**

**September 8, 2009**

**First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

## **MINUTES**

**Members present:** Wm. Levine, Touria Eaton, Pauline Lannon, Sally Fitz, Pat Wagner.

**Non-members present:** David Ziomek (staff liaison), Diana Stein (Select Board). Non-voting representative: Richard Roznoy (Planning Board).

### **Pre-meeting discussion:**

Prior to achieving a quorum, a discussion among present attendees focused on whether the Planning Board representative is a voting member of the Agricultural Commission. A Select Board document indicated that he/she IS a voting member. However, this document is incorrect. The Agricultural Commission charter indicates that representatives from other Boards/Commissions are NON-voting attendees.

After another Agricultural Commission member arrived, a quorum was established, and the agenda was discussed and decided upon as follows:

1. Review minutes
2. Farm festival update and discussion
3. Parade update
4. Relationship with Northampton Farmer's Market Association
5. Conservation Commission update:
  - Forever Farmland signs
  - Open States Recreation Plan
  - APR applications
6. Report on fireside chat about history of North Amherst farms
7. Revisit last meeting's discussion re: attracting new farmers to Amherst

### **1. Review minutes:**

- May 12, June 9, July 14 meeting minutes were approved without correction or amendment.
- August 11 minutes were corrected as follows: Pauline Lannon was among the attendees. Approved as corrected.

### **2. Farm festival update and discussion**

#### **Brochure/poster:**

- Sally reviewed the farm brochure. Asked for input regarding content. No input or feedback from several farms re: their role in farm tours and blurb in brochure. Diana will follow-up with Simple Gifts Farm. Sally will follow-up with Rocky Acres Farm, Sunset Farm, and Swartz Farm.

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- Touria provided outline of poster. Sally will edit and prepare for copying.
- Cost of reproducing brochure and poster was discussed. David agreed to have brochure and poster copied in-house. Sally will bring 2 reams (1,000 sheets) of colored paper to David.
- Distribution of brochure/poster was discussed. After copying is complete, commission members will pick up copied material, fold brochures, and distribute as follows:
  - Touria will hang up posters.
  - Wm. will distribute in Shutesbury, Leverett, Wendell, and Pelham.
  - Sally will distribute in South Amherst, libraries, and will send electronic flyer to schools and to David
    - so an electronic version can be posted on the town website.
  - Pauline will put brochures in Atkins.
- All agreed it would help to have enlarged posters for the farms to put up on festival day to help people find the farms. Sally will discuss with collective copies to see what is possible.

### Exhibits:

- Touria is the point person for coordinating exhibitors and will follow-up with the list below. On festival day, exhibitors will be directed to Pat Wagner, who will be helping to coordinate events on the Common. Possible exhibitors include:
  - UMass Extension
  - Mass. Farm Bureau
  - 4-H (Pat has arranged this)
  - NRCS
  - Stockbridge School (per Richard's suggestion)
  - USDA/Fish and wildlife
  - NOFA
  - Agricultural Commission
  - Amherst Farmer's Market
  - Kestrel Trust

### Food:

- Wm will arrange which farm will contribute which food. Wm will contact Sarah Swartz for guidance - she arranged the food for the farmers' forum at the Hitchcock Center in March. Pauline will provide needed quantities of food. Menu will be:
  - Barbeque chicken breasts
  - Corn bread
  - Cole slaw
  - Potato salad
  - Butternut squash
  - Apple crisp and ice cream
  - Drinks – cider, milk
- Pat read email from Pauline regarding food needs for the earlier part of the day. Group discussed the issue and agreed it would help to offer some food during the day until 3:00, after which time preparations would begin for the BBQ.

### **3. Parade update**

- Pat provided an update on the parade on 9/27. Line up is done; parade should last 2.5 hours or so. Same route as in the past. Great variety of parade participants within the theme of agriculture.

### **4. Relationship with Northampton Farmer's Market Association**

Wm. read about the Northampton Farmer's Market Association in the Gazette. In particular, this organization is forming a subcommittee that includes the Northampton Agricultural Commission, CISA and others to discuss and plan for the growth of the Northampton's Farmer's Market (which has recently expanded to two days/week). Wm. felt that making a connection to this subcommittee – or perhaps joining it in some way – would help us with the expansion of the Farmer's Market in Amherst. Discussion ensued. Among the questions raised was whether connecting to the Northampton organization would be helpful to the Amherst Farmer's Market. Wm. agreed to dialogue with a contact in the subcommittee to see if there was a way we could participate in/attend their subcommittee meetings. Wm. will update the commission at a future meeting.

### **5. Conservation Commission update:**

David presented an update regarding several Conservation Commission initiatives:

#### Forever Farmland signs

- The Select Board voted to erect the Forever Farmland signs around town to denote protected farmland. Privately owned farms can opt to put up the signs. Kestrel Trust is sending out a letter to farmers to see if they're willing to hang the sign. Kestrel Trust (and co-sponsors Amherst Agricultural Commission and Amherst Conservation Commission) is sponsoring the effort, including the signs, posts and labor to install. (A few farms in Hadley have put up the sign).

#### Open Space Recreation Plan

- Plan was submitted to the state on 7/15. It was very positively received and conditionally approved. The plan will be in effect for 5 years.

APR applications – Pat attended the last Conservation Commission meeting; she inquired about APR applications. David reported that he is not aware of any applications in the works. David reported that the Commonwealth Capital application, which is necessary to be eligible for state APR funds, is now complete. John Gerber is the new CPA liaison with the Conservation Commission. He invited the Agricultural Commission to join them in considering which farms are left to be preserved in Amherst. Over 1,500 acres of unprotected agricultural land still exists in Amherst (although not all of that land is prime agricultural land).

**6. Report on fireside chat on history of North Amherst farms:**

- Wm attended the fireside chat at Simple Gifts Farm in August. He said it was well attended and very interesting.

**7. Review of last meeting's discussion re: attracting new farmers to Amherst**

- Wm. reviewed his presentation of the July meeting re: attracting new farmers to Amherst. David indicated that, in order to see which land would be available, the constraints, natural features, etc. would have to be reviewed and taken into consideration. David indicated that Amherst College might be a source of land for new farmers. Wm. expressed interest in knowing what lease options would be available for new farmers.

- Pat advocated for the Agricultural Commission to be involved with certain situations on farms that involve the Conservation Commission. She cited a recent example of farmers who were unable to continue farming due to beaver damage that, per a decision by the Conservation Commission, could not be repaired/remediated.

- There was discussion and general agreement that it would help to connect new farmers to private and town farmland, and that the issues raised in the meeting would be worth further consideration by the Agricultural Commission.

Meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Fitz  
Temporary Secretary